

Title: A UNIVERSAL SIN, LUKE 18:9 – 14
(Chatham, NJ; 10/30/16, AM) [Pc – Exegesis, Classification Outline]

Theme: The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican illustrates the sin of self-righteousness that is common to all of us, not just the Pharisees.

Purpose: To expose the stereotypes and traps we fall into when interpreting this parable.

Introduction:

1. Luke follows up the story of the widow's persistence with another example of prayer.
2. This has a similar didactic structure: the lesson is stated, illustrated, then summarized.
3. Some unique pitfalls have developed from years of interpretation.
4. Today we'll look at the parable and decipher the stereotypes that have been imposed on our understanding or perhaps our misunderstanding of the story.

I. The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican Examined

A. Introduction (9)

1. Purpose of the story: confront certain attitudes
2. Address the self-righteous: those who trusted in themselves
3. And those (likely the same people) who treated others with contempt
4. Self-righteousness goes hand in hand with contempt for others
5. Like the previous parable, we are told what Jesus wants to teach us

B. The parable (10-13) – the lesson illustrated

1. A Pharisee and a tax collector went up to pray
2. The Pharisee pats himself on the back: he claims he hasn't committed any atrocious sins and he has fulfilled two religious obligations (all of these things are commendable, by the way)
3. The tax collector brings nothing to offer God except his shame: he won't lift his eyes, beats his breast, and pleads for mercy

C. Summary

1. The tax collector went away justified
2. He who exalts himself will be humbled
3. He who humbles himself will be exalted
4. A classic reversal, James 4:6, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."
5. We have no right to declare ourselves righteous in the eyes of God
6. We can only throw ourselves at his mercy, Titus 3:4-5

II. Classifying the Pharisee

A. The stereotype

1. Here is where our interpretation can go off the rails
2. To us he is the epitome of bad guys, the worst of the worst, the person we vilify and love to hate
3. By seeing him as the ultimate evil, we create a stereotype, a one-sided human being whom we remove far from our self image; we don't want to be him

B. The reality

1. Some things he claims not to have done are good things to avoid: adultery, etc.
2. His religious duties are not unimportant: prayer, tithing
3. Far be it from me to credit him with a good attitude, but his attempt to remain pure is at least admirable, perhaps even reflected in Psalm 17:3-5

- C. His colossal mistake
1. Believing these behaviors earned him a standing of righteousness from God
 2. Not seeing other impurities in his heart
 3. Being condescending and contemptuous of those who didn't live up to these standards
 4. Thinking that God had to accept him because of his righteous ways
 5. Pride fueled all of these

III. The Tax Collector (Publican)

- A. The stereotype
1. Our hero, the anti-Pharisee
 2. He becomes our hero, a generous Joe the bartender or Albert the atheist, for being a contrast to the hollow, religious hypocrite
 3. We want to be like him
- B. The reality
1. He was a sinner like all of us
 2. He went home justified only because he knew he was a sinner
 3. Jesus makes no mention about his need to repent and change his life; that is not the point of the parable
 4. He insists on that elsewhere, but we tend to forget that because we fail to see the tax collector's life later (we will see one in chap. 19)
 5. The Pharisee trusts in himself; the tax collector trusts in God: that is the difference.
- C. Our colossal mistake
1. Because he becomes the hero of the story, we might think he can go on his merry way without any accompanying change of life
 2. Furthermore, because he becomes our hero, we are tempted to tell ourselves, "We're glad we are like him and not like that evil Pharisee over there."
 3. In the *Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis imagines a senior devil counseling a younger devil: don't try to make the Christian feel pride, just make him aware of his humility.

Conclusions:

1. Salvation is by the grace and mercy of God, Ephesians 2 and Titus 3.
2. Let humility be genuine, not a matter to be compared with someone else.
3. God gives grace to the humble: hear David's comment, Psalm 51:17 (read).
4. A legitimate response to the Gospel is one that humbly recognizes sin, realizes only Christ can save us, and repents out of obedience to God's commands.
5. Washing away sin in baptism is an act of humility: God washes us.
6. Walk humbly with God in everything.